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ABSTRACT

The study of coping may lead to a better understanding of how children develop adaptive or maladaptive behaviors. Cross-cultural studies were conducted in 1965 and in 1968 with 10- and 14-year-old children from Brazil, England, Italy, Japan, Mexico, West Germany, Yugoslavia, and the United States. Attributes of attitudes, motivation, and coping behaviors were measured using the Behavior Rating Scale (BRS), a peer-rated index of coping behavior. A combination of coping and motivation measures showed greater power to explain school achievement than any previous noncognitive measures; the BRS was one of the best predictors of school achievement. Results from the two United States samples found that all BRS items, except for anxiety and aggression correlated highly with the children's grade point average. The findings indicate that children's peers are good judges of their peers' coping abilities with school situations and classroom achievement, and that the BRS is a valid measure of the effectiveness of children's classroom coping behaviors. (NRB)

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CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM

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CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR IN THE CLASSROOM

In their recent book Coulter and Morrow (1978) stated that measures of adaptive behavior have two purposes: identification/placement and intervention/programming. So far, a great deal of work has been done on creating reliable and valid measures of adaptive behavior, for the purpose of identifying children who exhibit maladaptive behavior. However, after a study of a wide array of adaptive behavior measures, it is not clear how intervention programs can be generated from these measures. Adaptive behavior measures tend to establish that a child does exhibit a specific behavior, but there are no indications of how the process of adaptation occurred. If the process of adaptation was understood, perhaps more accurate intervention programs could be formulated.

Lois Murphy (1962) states that coping behavior in the process of adaptation, and adaptation is the end result of coping. Zietlin (1980) defines coping as "an active adaptive process of using strategies to manage one's world." In current literature, no agreement exists about the relationship of the concepts of adaptive and coping behavior, however utilizing the relationship described by Murphy and Zietlin, it is reasonable that the study of coping could lead to a better understanding of how mentally handicapped or normal children obtain the adaptive or maladaptive behavior they exhibit. such understanding could lead to more accurate intervention programming on behalf of children who exhibit maladaptive behavior.

A major purpose of this paper is to highlight the fact that the independent fields of research - adaptive behavior and coping behavior - do complement one another. Toward this purpose: (1) a current research program on children's coping behavior will be described, (2) a peer-rated measure of coping behavior will be described, and (3) a current conception of the process of coping will be described.

The data reported here come from the cross-national study of Coping Styles and Achievement with Dr. R. F. Peck as principal investogator. The study was conjointly designed and implemented by an eight nation team, including researchers from Brazil, England, Italy, Japan, Mexico, West Germany, Yugoslavia, and the United States. This cross-national study of coping behavior used school achievement as a validity indicator for the various coping measures.

The participants in this study were two stratified, random samples of students from each of these countries with two groups in the United States. There were equal numbers of 10 and 14 year olds, boys and girls, and upper-middle class and upper-lower class. The first sample (1965, Stage I) included 6,400 children and the second sample (1968, Stage III) included 3,600 children. The data for this paper include only children from the two United States areas: communities near Chicago, Illinois, and Austin, Texas.

The instruments for this study were developed in an international conference, translated, back translated, pilot-tested, and revised until item-comparability in six languages was attained. Several instruments were devised to measure attributes of each of

three components of competent behavior: attitudes and feelings, motivation, and coping behaviors. In this study, five different situations, common to all schools, were used as a context for observing coping behavior. These five situations included academic and non-academic task achievement, interpersonal relations, authorities, aggressive situations (self and others), and anxiety situations.

One of the instruments used to measure coping in these five school situations was The Behavior Rating Scale (BRS). This measure was unique because it was a peer-rated index of coping behavior.

The Behavior Rating Scale (BRS) was a version of the peer nomination technique, for use in a classroom setting. There were seven items in the original version: (1) Academic Task Achievement (Who works hardest at their lessons?), (2) Non-Academic Task Achievement (Who works hardest at outside activities?), (3) Authority (Who gets along best with teachers and other grownups?), (4) Interpersonal Relations (Who is best in working with others?), (5) Anxiety (Who gets upset most easily when things go wrong?), (6) Aggressive Self-Assertion (Who fights the hardest to get their way?), (7) Coping with Aggression (Who can work it out when another person is angry with them?). In Stage I, each student was asked to nominate the 25% of their class who best fitted the description; and the 25% who least fitted it.

In the Stage III instrument, several of the items were altered for clarity, or to limit them to questions children felt they had the information to answer. The Stage III BRS consisted

of 9 items: (1) Academic Task Achievement (Who works hardest in school?), (2) Authority Relations in School (Who gets along best with teachers?), (3) Interpersonal Relations (Who gets along best with the students in your class?), (4) Persistence (Who can usually be counted on to help work at tasks until they are finished?), (5) Self-Assertiveness (Who usually gets their own way?), (6) Initiation (Who starts working at things that need to be done without having to be told?), (7) Solver (Who has the best ideas?), (8) Control of Aggressive Affect (Who loses their temper?), (9) Control of Anxiety (Who worries most?). They were asked to nominate the 10% of their class who best fitted the description. Negative nominations were dropped because teachers in Japan found them objectionable.

In the Stage I Testing, a class roster was included for each item, in order to reduce memory load. This procedures was discarded for the State III testing. On the Stage III instrument, the first item was a dummy item, "Who do you like best in your class?" This dummy item was used to reduce social popularity effects.

Test-retest reliability was measured for the Austin sample of 14 year olds. They were separated into three intellectual ability groups, and the factor score reliabilities over twelve weeks were .95, .83, and .97. Therefore, the scores on this behavior rating scale are stable over time.

A child's score on the BRS was the algebraic sum of positive and negative nominations in State I; in Stage III, the sum of positive nominations received from peers. Both scores were corrected for class size. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to compare

various subgroups. A criterion of .05 level of significance was used.

Results

Using multiple regression analysis, an overall finding of this study was that coping and motivation measures together showed much greater power to explain school achievement than any previous noncognitive measures. This Behavior Rating Scale (BRS) was one of the best predictors of school achievement. Even though the BRS scores were the last to be placed in regression equations, the BRS consistently accounted for more of the R^2 change than did other variables, especially when the criterion was grade point average.

In both the Chicago and Austin samples, all the BRS items but anxiety and aggression, correlated highly with the children's GPA. This sample included both the 10 and 14 year olds, and these findings were replicated in the Stage III testing. In both samples, GPA was related most highly with the BRS items, followed by Reading Achievement and then Mathematics Achievement. As expected, the Academic Tools Achievement items correlated most highly with the grade point average.

These findings indicate two things: (1) children's peers are good judges of how well a child copes with school situations, in particular classroom achievement, and (2) the BRS is a valid measure of the effectiveness of children's classroom coping.

Some differences exist by age, sex, and sex concerning how children handle various school situations. Fourteen year old males were better than age-mate females at being self-assertive

and handling anxiety situations; whereas ten year old males did not show this difference. A consistent finding across all testing was that middle class children were peer-rated as better copers on all scales, than upper-lower class children. One interesting age reversal across all countries was that at ten years of age middle class children handle anxiety situations better than lower-SES-class children, but the reverse was true at age 14. Across all countries, both sexes think that boys have "the best ideas" more oftener than girls. There were no other universal sex differences. In the United States samples, females of both age groups were peer-rated as better than males at handling authority figures, aggression situations, and anxiety situations. Males were usually rated as being more self-assertive than females in both age groups.

From a brief description of this behavior rating scale and a few examples of findings with this instrument, some comparisons can be made to current adaptive behavior measures. This peer-rated coping measure describes a child's efforts to handle school situations, as one's peers sees them. Current adaptive behavior measures attempt to observe the same behaviors, from the teachers' or parents' point of view. This BRS attempts to evaluate how well some children handle task problem solving, social situations, and intra-personal behavior. Current adaptive behavior measures try to measure these same behaviors, plus many more domains of behavior. This particular BRS was devised for generally normal, ten year old children in different countries; whereas most adaptive behavior measures are used with mentally handicapped children in

the pre-school or elementary school age range. However, the similarities between this coping measure and some adaptive behavior measures are obvious.

Process of Coping

Some of the items in the BRS hint at the current conception of the process of coping as devised by Peck and Associates (1979). This model of the process of coping was originally conceived in 1964, and it has continually undergone revision. A sentence completion instrument and a forced-choice questionnaire were developed to measure the steps in this model of the coping process.

In this model, coping is defined as a series of steps in resolving problems. It can be applied to any sample of behavior in real life that shows how a person reacts when confronted with a problem. "Behavior" includes overt statements the person may make about his own thoughts, as well as the actions the person takes. The System is sequential.

The first question is, does the person mentally confront the problem or not? Whenever the person thinks and talks about the issue, or expresses an intent to deal with it, this deserves credit as a confronting stance, whether or not action follows. A purely emotional reaction which leads to verbal or physical aggression, with no attempt to deal with the substantive issue, is classified as non-confronting, non-coping behavior.

If the person does confront the issue, the next question is, does he try to do something about it; does he engage in coping action? If he does, parallel question is, who initiates this action: the person himself, someone else, or he and another person,

jointly? Overall, people who take direct action, on their own initiative, most often seemed to be the best copers.

Sometimes, when a problem arises, either solicited or unsolicited advice enters the picture. In quite a few circumstances, it may be very wise to seek and use advice in working out a solution, however, the better copers seem to be those who tackle problems on their own, without often calling for help.

The next question is, who originates the specific idea that is selected to solve the problem? Sometimes, this cannot be identified separately from the initiation of action but frequently the idea for the final solution arises after action has been initiated. Is the solution conceived by the person himself, by someone else, or through a joint effort? The better copers appear to be those who can conceive solutions by themselves.

Once a trial solution has been decided on, the question is, who implements it: the person, someone else, or both? As with the solver dimension, the order of effectiveness runs from "self" to "other" to "joint" implementation.

The next major question is, how much does the person persist in trying to reach a solution? On the whole, better copers were thought to be those who would try alternative solutions if the first or second one didn't work, up to some point of vanishing returns. When a first effort does not work, or when an obstacle is encountered, non-copers may explode in angry frustration, blame someone or something else, or simply give up.

The final test of effective coping, though not the only one, is the effectiveness of the outcome. In every day life, there are times when a problem simply cannot be solved. No matter how much ingenuity and effort an individual may apply, some situations permit no satisfactory resolution. Nonetheless, in looking at a variety of problems, it seemed that good copers most often did succeed in working out at least a somewhat satisfactory resolution.

The process of coping can be generalized to many specific situations. Perhaps, Sam and Phil are fighting over who plays with a particular toy. They can each be encouraged to: (1) acknowledge they are having a fight, (2) encouraged to think of all the possible ways to get what they want and still cooperate, (3) encouraged to tell each other their ways to cooperate until (4) they find an acceptable resolve. The same process of coping can be used with task achievement, interpersonal relations, dealing with authorities, handling self and others aggressions, and handling intra-personal problems such as anxiety.

Currently, the fields of research on adaptive and coping behavior seem to be functioning independently of each other. Zietlin (1980) has started to bring these two bodies of knowledge together. Actually, adaptive behavior measures provide a practical guide to maladaptive behaviors, and conceptions of coping behavior provide a possible generalizable guide to intervention planning. Both fields of research are rather new and need considerable empirical research. In the process of their research, both endeavors

could benefit from trading ideas, methods, instruments, research finding, and practical implications.

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